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SUBJECT: DEMARCHE RE UNESCO ACTIVITIES IN KOSOVO

REF: STATE 075014

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY. The French Ambassador joined us July 21 in pressing UNESCO's Assistant Director-General for Culture Francoise Riviere for a status-neutral approach and greater cooperation with the authorities on the ground in Kosovo. The U.S. Charge d'Affaires (CDA) also complained of UNESCO's slow progress toward repair of cultural sites using money the U.S. donated in 2005. Riviere essentially acknowledged our points on a status-neutral policy but argued that much of the problem lies with UNESCO's Venice Office which reports directly to the Director-General and not to her. In response to our warning, Riviere's assistants claimed they had not heard of a plan to put signs on monuments restored with U.S. funds that would identify them as being located in Serbia and undertook to check this report out. They also claimed that work on repair of sites funded by the U.S.G. is moving much more quickly now and should be completed by November 2009. Riviere asked whether we could put our demarche in written form so she could pass it directly to the Director-General. The French Ambassador responded that we would see what we could do, but she urged Riviere to let the Director-General know immediately about our concerns. Speaking after the meeting, the French Ambassador remarked that she found Riviere's excuse that all problems are the fault of the Venice Office to be an exaggeration. Riviere could exert more influence if she tried. The French Ambassador agreed we should put our points in writing and send them to the Director-General in a short letter. We will explore this idea with the German, Italian, and UK delegations in the coming days. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) French Ambassador Catherine Colonna and U.S. Charge d'Affaires (CDA) called on UNESCO's Assistant Director-General for Culture Francoise Riviere on July 21 to urge UNESCO in the name of the Quint countries (U.S., France, Germany, Italy, and the UK) to adopt a status-neutral approach to Kosovo and to complain that UNESCO's Venice Office does not coordinate properly with the authorities on the ground in Kosovo, including Western embassies in Pristina and officials of the Government of Kosovo. CDA stressed that UNESCO representatives often miss meetings on religious and cultural preservation issues that UNMIK officials attend. We cannot understand why UNESCO avoids meetings that other UN officials attend. CDA also complained of UNESCO's slow progress in implementing rehabilitation projects in Kosovo and warned strongly against having any sort of sign put up on the monuments the U.S. is paying to restore that would indicate that the monuments are located in Serbia. This would be unacceptable to us.

¶3. (SBU) Riviere, who was joined by the World Heritage Center's Europe/North America section chief Mechtild Rossler and by Anna Bonetti of the UNESCO office that handles extra-budgetary donations, acknowledged that "status-neutral" is UN policy (N.B. the first time

we have heard a UNESCO official say so) and claimed that she supported it. She also acknowledged that representatives of the European Commission had demarched UNESCO this past spring with many of the same complaints. Riviere claimed to share our views and conceded that UNESCO had not always appeared to be implementing a status-neutral approach. She said, however, that she did not supervise the employee in the Venice office (Marie-Paul Roudil) who oversees restoration projects in Kosovo (reftel). Roudil, she maintained, reports directly to Director-General Matsuura. Riviere said she would report our demarche to the Director-General but asked whether we had something in writing that she could show the Director-General to explain directly to him our point of view. Ambassador Colonna replied that we would try to find a way to put our thoughts in writing, but urged Riviere not to wait and to express our concerns to the Director-General immediately.

¶4. (SBU) Rossler and Bonetti responded to our questions about the progress of the restoration projects at cultural sites in Kosovo. Bonetti admitted that it had taken UNESCO from 2005 to 2007 to get the necessary permits to begin work on the Serbian Orthodox sites in Kosovo but argued that work had been proceeding apace since 2007. She acknowledged that U.S. officials in Pristina had been sufficiently concerned about progress on these projects in May to question whether contracts on them should be extended. (CDA warned that the possibility of not extending them had been seriously considered.) According to Bonetti, work on five of the contracts will be completed in August, and all the work will be done by November. Regarding the placement of a sign on these sites indicating that they are located in Serbia, Rossler said she had never heard of such a possibility and would have to check. We insisted that this report has been circulating for some time and that we very much would like assurances it is untrue. Riviere interjected that she did not see a need for a sign to indicate the

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country in which these monuments were located.

¶5. (SBU) As the meeting moved to conclusion, Riviere said that Anthony Krause, an American citizen who works on the Director-General's personal staff, will make the next UNESCO visit to Kosovo at the end of August. Ambassador Colonna said this was all well and good, but that it did not solve the systemic problem. Why is the Venice office responsible for the Balkans? This arrangement has been in place for more than a decade while the situation on the ground in the Balkans has changed dramatically. CDA asked if there was any thought to opening an office in Pristina.

Riviere replied that these were good questions. UNESCO might be able to open a small office in Pristina, but this will depend on decisions by the new Director-General who will be chosen at UNESCO's General Conference in October of this year.

¶6. (SBU) Comment: Riviere appeared reluctant to have this meeting. It was called on only a few hours notice on Riviere's last day before summer holidays. This made it difficult to include the German, UK, and Italian delegations. We decided to proceed, however, when the French said they could join at the time proposed. Riviere is a French national and likely to be impressed by official French positions. Joint U.S.-French demarches are rare enough here to attract notice.

¶7. (SBU) Comment Continued: Useful though the July 21 meeting was, it will obviously take continued pressure up and down the UNESCO hierarchy to bring about meaningful change in UNESCO's handling of Kosovo issues. Our French colleague did not find entirely credible Riviere's claim that the actions of the Venice Office were beyond her control. She felt Riviere could do more than she has been doing to make its behavior status-neutral. Ambassador Colonna and CDA agreed we should pursue Riviere's suggestion of sending something to the Director-General in writing. We will talk to our German, Italian, and British colleagues about joining us in sending the Director-General a short letter making the points in reftel.

